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Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States

AN ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

Arche Club of Chicago Illinois

FEBRUARY 21 1908

BY

CAPTAIN ROSWELL H. MASON

RECORDER OF THE

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"The Military Order of the Loyal Legion had its inception on that saddest day, at the conclusion of the War of the Rebellion, when humanity throughout the world was shocked by the death of Abraham Lincoln. In honor of that illustrious memory and of the great cause for which we had fought; in recognition of the affectionate friendships which had been inspired among the officers of the Army then about to disband; in historic recollection of the Society of the Cincinnati, which had embraced the officers of the Revolutionary Army, it was determined to form this Order; and at a meeting of a few officers in the City of Philadelphia the initial steps were that day taken for its organization. It was the first of the military societies which followed, or rather accompanied the close of the War." (General Charles Deven's Twenty-fifth Anniversary Oration, April 15, 1890.)

On April 15, 1865, a meeting was held in the office of Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Ellwood Zell in Philadelphia, to take action for the officers and ex-officers of the Army and Navy to act as a guard of honor to the remains of the President. It was determined by those present to call a meeting on April 20 of those who had served in the War of the Rebellion, when Colonel Zell presented a motion, which was adopted, that a society should be formed to commemorate the events and principles of the War for the Union, then drawing to a close, and that measures should be adopted to promote that object. Subsequent meetings of those interested were held and a provisional organization was effected at a meeting held May 31 in the room in Independence Hall where the first Senate and House of Representatives of the United States assembled and in which Washington was inaugurated. ("The Organization of the Loyal Legion," by Colonel Zell, "United Service Magazine," February, 1889.)

Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Brown Wylie Mitchell, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Ellwood Zell, and Captain Peter Dirck Keyser, are designated as the founders of the Order, Colonel Mitchell's insignia and diploma being Number 1.

The plan of a permanent organization having been perfected, the Commandery of the State of Pennsylvania was organized November 4, 1865, to date from April 15, commemorating the day of the first meeting. Major-General

George Cadwalader was elected Commander, and Colonel Mitchell Recorder; both served also as Acting Commander-in-Chief and Acting Recorder-in-Chief respectively until their deaths in 1879.

The Commandery of the State of Pennsylvania continued to be the acting Commandery-in-Chief until October 21, 1885, when the Commandery-in-Chief was organized. Major-General Winfield Scott Hancock having become acting Commander-in-Chief in 1879, was elected the first Commander-in-Chief, serving until his death in 1886. The successive Commanders-in-Chief have been: General Philip Henry Sheridan, 1886; Brevet Major-General Rutherford Birchard Hayes, 1889; Brigadier-General Lucius Fairchild, 1892; Major-General John Gibbon, 1895; Rear Admiral Bancroft Gherardi, 1896; Lieutenant-General John McAllister Schofield, 1899; Brevet Major-General David McMurtrie Gregg, 1903; Major General John Rutter Brooke, 1905; Major-General Grenville M. Dodge, 1907. Brevet Lieutenant-Colonel John Page Nicholson succeeded Colonel Mitchell as acting Recorder-in-Chief in 1879, and in 1885 became Recorder-in-Chief, serving continuously to the present time. To him, more than to any other one man, is due the growth and prosperity of the Order.

Among Commanders of State Commanderies have been: General Ulysses S. Grant and Admiral David G. Farragut, New York; General Philip H. Sheridan, Illinois; Ex-Presidents Rutherford B. Hayes and Benjamin Harrison and General William T. Sherman, Ohio; Lieutenant-Generals John M. Schofield, Nelson A. Miles and Samuel B. M. Young, California.

All legislative power is vested in the Congress of the Order, composed of three representatives from each Commandery, which meets quadrennially.

The executive and judicial power is vested in the Commandery-in-Chief, which consists of the Commanders, ex-Commanders, Vice-Commanders, ex-Vice-Commanders, Recorders and ex-Recorders of the various Commanderies. It meets annually.

Six meetings yearly is the average among the Commanderies; the proceedings generally include business meeting, collation and reading of a historical paper. Many volumes of these contributions to War History have been published. A majority of the Commanderies maintain permanent headquarters and possess valuable collections of books, pictures and relics pertaining to the War period.

There are twenty State Commanderies and one in the District of Columbia, and the membership of the Order, October 31, 1907, was 8,941. Of these, 5,601 served during the war for the preservation of the Union, 3,325 are the sons or grandsons of men who had so served, and 15 are men who, in civil life, during the war, were specially distinguished for conspicuous and consistent loyalty to the National Government, and were active and eminent in maintaining the supremacy of the same.

Article II of the Constitution of the Order states:

"This Order acknowledges as its fundamental principles:

First. A firm belief and trust in Almighty God, extolling Him under whose beneficent guidance the sovereignty and integrity of the Union have been maintained, the honor of the Flag vindicated, and the blessings of civil liberty secured, established and enlarged.

Second. True allegiance to the United States of America, based upon paramount respect for and fidelity to the National Constitution and Laws, manifested by discountenancing whatever may tend to weaken loyalty, incite to insurrection, treason or rebellion, or impair in any manner the efficiency and permanency of our free institutions."

Article III states:

The objects of this Order shall be to cherish the memories and associations of the war waged in defence of the unity and indivisibility of the Republic; strengthen the ties of fraternal fellowship and sympathy formed by companionship-in-arms; advance the best interests of the soldiers and sailors of the United States, especially of those associated as Companions of this Order, and extend all possible relief to their widows and children; foster the cultivation of military and naval science; enforce unqualified allegiance to the General Government; protect the rights and liberties of American citizenship, and maintain National Honor, Union and Independence.

The Original Companions—those who served during "the war waged in defence of the unity and indivisibility of the Republic"—are rapidly passing away, and when they have gone, the clause "strengthen the ties of fraternal fellowship and sympathy formed by companionship-in-arms" will become obsolete, but aside from this, we believe the objects set forth are those which should and will remain a living force, binding together our successors in the Order, and that they, deriving their membership from us, will feel it their especial privilege and duty by precept and example, to inculcate lessons of patriotism and instill in the hearts of all our people a devoted love for our country and our flag.

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